

7

Time, and the Redemption of Time.

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED ON THE 16TH OF AUGUST 1790,

AFTER THE
DISPENSATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER,

IN THE
CONGREGATION OF COLINSBURGH;

AND
Published at the request of the Hearers.

BY
WILLIAM ARTHUR. K

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED BY W. DARLING, ADVOCATES CLOSE.
1790.

PRICE SIXPENCE.



EPHES V. 16.

Redeeming the time.

WERE a stranger to drop from the clouds, and to form his opinion of mankind on their conduct, he, doubtless, would conclude that man is immortal. Are there not persons, many, even within the boundaries of Christendom, who, by the course of nature, must be on the confines of the eternal world, and about to drop into the fearful abyss, who, notwithstanding, are never heard from morning to evening, from week to week, so much as once to mention their approaching dissolution? Their groveling souls cling to this transient world, to which alone their ambition and their views appear to be confined; and, in the end, when nature recoils, they leave it with the most invincible reluctance. Were such characters

to express, in undisguised terms, their wishes, each for himself would readily exclaim, ' O that I could live always ! O to live for ever ' below the sun ! ' But if we consider the fleeting and shadowy nature of all temporary acquisitions, how unworthy is it of the man, the rational man, who is endued with faculties to aspire after more substantial objects, not to say the Christian, to place his affections on such sordid enjoyments ? ' It is appointed unto all men once to die ; ' and immediately after death the particular *judgment* happens, by which the final state of every man is irrevocably determined. In a little the grim messenger will knock at our door. In a little the hungry grave will open its devouring mouth to receive us. To the sun, the moon, and the stars ; to friends and relations ; to the bible and the militant church ; to every sublunary bliss, we will bid a long adieu. No longer will our ears be charmed with the melodious voice of the heavenly turtle. Nor will we be favoured with an opportunity of repeating what we did yesterday ; engaging, with united hearts, in a sacramental commemoration of our dear Redeemer's death. How important, then, Christians,

stians, the exercise to which we are now called? the exercise of *redeeming the time*, which words I proceed to explain and apply.

When the term *redemption* occurs, Christians are familiarised to recollect Jesus; and it readily excites in their breasts the idea of that grand work, for accomplishing which the assumption of human nature was intended to qualify him. Having poured out his soul unto death; having shed his infinitely precious blood, he accomplished that eternal redemption to which immense sums of silver and gold, nay, all the gems of both the eastern and western shores are inadequate. But the application of words, is, in a great measure, arbitrary; and custom often assumes the authority of a law. The Apostle speaks of the redemption of *time*; and, indeed, as the sequel will evince, the proper improvement of present opportunities and privileges is intended and admirably calculated to subserve the important purposes of our eternal redemption. To redeem, as the well known etymology of the term indicates, literally is to buy back a person or a thing that has been alienated and lost; and when the Apostle speaks of *redeeming the time*, he means, in general,

these three particulars which follow; that, *first*, time is precious; that, *second*, much precious time has been lost; and that, *third*, to improve the present time is the only method of compensating the loss of the past.

First, The time is precious. The preciousness of time arises, in a considerable degree, from the brevity of it. *Time is short*. This, my brethren, is a momentous point; and the due consideration of it one of the strongest incentives to the improvement of opportunities equally precious and precarious.

In common speaking eternity and time stand opposed. That had no beginning, and has no end; this has both. Not that we have the least reason to look for the annihilation of any thing which God has made. None of his works seem intended for annihilation. But that district of his vast universe, which is appointed to be the temporary residence of mankind, and its environs, are to undergo a most material change; a change which will amount to entire renovation. 'We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein are to dwell righteous men.' Feeling forcibly the penal and baneful effects of the curse, 'the whole
' creation

' creation groaneth and travaileth in pain
 ' together until now,' and will continue
 to do so, till it obtain total and final de-
 liverance. Of eternity, indeed, we, whose
 minds are contracted within a very nar-
 row circle of speculation, must acknow-
 ledge ourselves almost totally ignorant.—
 How august and how lofty is the description
 of eternity and the commencement of time,
 with which the book of proverbs has favou-
 red us! 'I,' says the wisdom of God, 'was set
 ' up from everlasting; from the beginning;
 ' ere ever the earth was; when there were
 ' no depths I was brought forth; when there
 ' were no fountains abounding with water.
 ' Before the mountains, before the hills were
 ' brought forth. While as yet he had not
 ' made the earth, nor the fields, nor the high-
 ' est part of the dust of the world. When he
 ' prepared the heavens I was there; when he
 ' set a compass upon the face of the deep;
 ' when he established the clouds above; when
 ' he strengthened the fountains of the deep;
 ' when he gave the sea his decree that the
 ' waters should not pass his commandment;
 ' when he appointed the foundations of the
 earth;

‘ earth ; then I was by him as one brought
 ‘ up with him ; and I was daily his delight,
 ‘ rejoicing always before him.’ Equally pa-
 thetical and moving is the manner in which
 the inspired Psalmist has described both the
 commencement and the final consummation
 of time. ‘ Of old hast thou,’ O incompre-
 hensible Jehovah, ‘ laid the foundations of
 ‘ the earth, and the heavens are the work of
 ‘ thy hands. They shall perish, but thou
 ‘ shalt endure. Yea, all of them shall wax
 ‘ old like a garment ; as a vesture shalt thou
 ‘ change them, and they shall be changed.’

Prior to the production of all things into
 that immense mass of shapeless chaos, which
 could, by no plausible supposition, arise from
 a fortuitous concourse of atoms, under the
 direction of blind chance ; prior to the for-
 mation of them into the astonishingly great,
 fair, and beautiful worlds which we, with
 wonder, gratitude and joy, contemplate ; there
 were no heavens, no earth, no suns, no moons,
 no stars, no hills cloathed with stately cedars,
 no plains adorned with verdure, no seas, con-
 sequently no clouds occasioned by the exhale-
 ment and condensation of vapours, no sum-
 mers, no winters, no days, no nights. That
 great

great Being, of whose peerless nature immensity and eternity are essential perfections, existed alone. Here the human mind is lost; and from the bewildering maze is altogether unable to extricate itself. But 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth;' and, like its inhabitants, our earth is to continue a limited time; and, when the mysteries of divine providence are accomplished, it, and the periodical revolutions, diurnal and annual, which measure its present duration, will undergo a wondrous change. Once, indeed, our earth was young; but now waxeth old, and its dissolution hasteth on apace. Awful consideration!

The text speaks of redeeming THE time; and short is the time of both the world and the church. I speak of their *present* state. The period approacheth, at which the seasons, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, will succeed to each other no more. Nor will agriculture or commerce, navigation or the arts of war be longer put into practice. Moving, indeed, are the revolutions which the most celebrated empires and kingdoms have already undergone; revolutions which mark every thing sublunary to be of a transient

sient nature, and apprise us of the approaching fate of empires now famous for power, and cities now celebrated for trade. Agreeably to Daniel's ancient predictions, the Chaldean and the Persian, the Grecian and the Roman empires, have been long ago overturned ; and the instances, in which families and persons have been reduced from plenty to poverty, from affluence to extreme want, are too many to be recounted on this occasion. All mankind are now on a rapid journey to the land of silence ; and, though we now belong to different habitations, we will all in a little co-habit in the one house appointed for every living man. Here the pompous, the empty, the unmeaning titles and distinctions of time are unknown. Here the voice of ambition and discord is not heard. How mortifying is it to the opulent and the great, that his estates and possessions, whether he enjoys them by inheritance or by purchase, being reversionary, are soon to be claimed by a successor ; and that in the grave lies the ragged and neglected peasant on a perfect equality with the brilliant and flattered prince ?

The present state of the church is also short.

The

The Jewish œconomy is past; and the Christian is also to have an end; and, for the dispensation of the word, or the administration of the sacraments, there is no occasion in heaven; there the ordinances are fully superseded by the immediate presence and beatific vision of God and the Lamb; there the redeemed breathe in an atmosphere always placid and serene; there God wipes away all tears from the eyes of his saints; so that the voice of mourning is never heard above; for there the lamb leads them to drink in the limped streams of life complete. In that happy world the mysteries of grace and providence are unravelled and laid open to view, and its blissful inhabitants are satisfied that wisdom and equity are characteristic of all the ways of God. Happy beings!

Considered in relation to eternity, and an eternity of bliss, how important as well as short is time? Human life is a vapour. *Brethren, the time is shortened.* In earlier ages human life was comparatively long. The Antediluvian longevity of mankind has been greatly abridged. For the birth and for the death of each individual of mankind periods are enrolled in the annals of heaven; and the bounds

bounds of his habitation no one of us can possibly pass. Appointed numbers of days were allotted for us while we lay unconscious and motionless in the silent womb of non-existence; and, when our glass is run, we will all, phantom-like, vanish. Revolving in your minds, especially during the favoured moments of pensive meditation, those and other considerations equally apposite and obvious, you will readily, I presume, join issue with me when I affirm that time, and *the* time is precious.

1. *The Time of Youth.*

This is an early, and, indeed, a most important period of life. Expecting to reap a plentiful harvest, the laborious husbandman begins betimes in the spring to sow his fields. Having seen the morning and dawn of life, and having reached that valuable period which we call youth, you are now, my dear young friends, called to arise and prepare for the harvest of old age, I should have said rather the eternal world; as tender plants as the youngest in the company being often precipitately hewn down by the hatchet of death. You are now in the bloom of life;
and

and O what a pity if the autumnal blast of death overtake you before the blossoms are formed into perfect fruit! How many hoary heads are there going down with sorrow and plaintive sighs to the grave, who, having spent the bloom of life in the frequented rounds of dissipation and debauchery, would give worlds to recal their past years and folly? Their time, their money, and their constitution have been devoted as, priceless victims, to eating and drinking, and every species of debauchery and riot; and prodigality has hastened on old age apace. In the vices, which were once as their meat and their drink, they now find no such satisfaction; and, if final impenitence is given them as the just punishment of their sins, there remaineth nothing for them but a fearful looking for judgment, and fiery indignation from the Lord of Hosts to devour them. Thousands countless and untold have repented that they did not begin betimes to be religious. But though you read all the histories extant, I challenge you to find so much as one instance of a person grieving because he became religious too soon. No such instance is on record; and the greater part of God's children

children, we have every reason to believe, are converted in their earlier years. Alluring their young and susceptible hearts, he calls *them into the wilderness* which lies in their way from spiritual Egypt to the celestial Canaan; *speaks comfortably to them*; and enters into a covenant of paternal and perpetual friendship with them. The Surety having fulfilled the onerous condition of this new covenant, every person, for whom he, on whose mediatorial head the oil of gladness was poured so copiously that it runs down to the hem of his pontifical garment, died, is, in due time, interested savingly in the infinitely rich promises of it.

Numerous are the advantages, glorious are the examples, with which early piety comes recommended to us. Of Abijah, the son of Jereboam, and perhaps, the only gracious person in his irreligious family, it is written, that in him, while he was yet young, 'there was some good thing found towards the Lord God of Israel.' Josiah, one of Judah's kings, whose accession to the throne happened about the eight year of his age, was so eminent and exemplary for early piety, that when he was no more than sixteen, or at most twenty
years

years old, he discovered not only the most exemplary punctuality in the duties of personal and domestic devotion, but his zeal and public spirit in promoting religious reformation throughout his whole empire. To the immortal and ceaseless honour of Timothy, who seems to have received an early religious education from his mother and grandmother, pious Jewish women, his father being a Greek, it is said, that 'from a child he knew the holy scriptures; the scriptures which were able to make him wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Jesus Christ.' Religion has every thing to recommend it; nay, it may be affirmed to be its own reward; and an early acquaintance with Jesus who came to seek and to save the lost, is a ground of the greatest thankfulness. All the redeemed, in both heaven and earth, who were converted to the Saviour in their earlier years, are exceedingly thankful, not only for their conversion, but the early period in which it happened. Writing to the Romans, the Apostle of the Gentiles mentions, with much affection, Andronicus and Junia, his kinsmen and his fellow prisoners, who were of note among the Apostles, who

‘ who also’, adds he, ‘ were in Christ before me’. By Junia, or, as it has been read, Junias, a male member of the church, one imagines, is intended; another supposes a female, and that she was spouse to Andronicus. Happy and honoured pair! Andronicus and Junia are supposed to have been early converts to Jesus and his church, known to the Apostles and much esteemed by them, prior, perhaps to the dispersion of the church in Jerusalem, which was occasioned by the persecution which was raised after the death of Stephen. The illustrious characters, of whom I speak, and whose names are embellished with inspired honours, and transmitted with unfading lustre to posterity, were inferior to Paul and his fellow apostles, who occupied a superior station in the church of Christ, after which its other members, or even ministers were not to aspire. But the Apostle mentions an important circumstance in which Andronicus and Junia were superior, and had the advantage of him. ‘ They were,’ says he, ‘ in Christ before me.’

The compassionate Saviour stands with expanded arms to receive all; and I proclaim the patency of the way to him. All are welcome.

welcome. Nay, all are invited: the old, the middle-aged, and, in a particular manner, the young; for, says he, "*those who seek me early shall, without a peradventure, find me.*"

The ruin of children, you will allow me to say, often lies on the heads of graceless parents; and, though grace is not hereditary, does not flow from father to son in the channel of human generation; to descend from irreligious progenitors I consider as a heavy judgment, and, on the contrary, to be the children of godly parents I account one of the greatest blessings which heaven can bestow. Nay, countless thousands now encircle the celestial throne, who sing, in elevated strains, the wonders of redeeming grace; and, in their enraptured song, their early conversion composes one of the highest notes. Encouraged with the inspiring hope and animating prospect that your children will be an honour to religion, not to say their connections and their country, instil into their minds, while they are yet young, the heavenly dew of a religious education; and while thousands are most solicitous to acquaint their children with romances and novels, infusing into their young minds, in

B

which

which the seeds of depravity have already been sown, the most gloomy ideas of religion, be careful, O Christian parents, to educate your tender offspring, who are now as olive plants around your table, at the Saviour's school. Is not the religion of Jesus a noble system? Does it not excel all the novels and plays which ever have employed the exertions of human genius? In this way the true, not the spurious, maxims of morality will be early and indelibly printed on their susceptible minds; and, a blessing from on high accompanying your endeavours, the fountain of original impurity and vice will be shut up, and a spring of uncontaminated virtue will be opened. Can a muddy fountain emit transparent streams? Can the pure rivulets of a holy conversation flow from the polluted fountain of the unrenewed heart? Be ashamed all ye who extol and flatter the imaginary virtues and excellencies of human nature in the fallen state! O my young brethren, this is the morning and prime of life; and though neither you nor I have seen many years*, we are fast approaching our meridian, and who knows but our sun may go down at noon? Shall he set before, we can say,

* The Author is one of the youngest in the ministry.

say, with pious Simeon, who waited for Israel's consolation, "now lettest thou thy fervant depart in peace, according to thy word ; " for mine eyes have seen thy salvation? God " forbid."

2. *The Time of Health.*

An unspeakable privilege this ! I might have mentioned soundness of mind. What a precious blessing is the exercise of reason ! and greatly is the person to be pitied whom heaven has been righteously pleased to deprive of it. His understanding dignifies man above all the beasts of the field ; above all the fishes of the sea ; above all the fowls of heaven ; and, deprived of the exercise of this ennobling faculty, what a loss does he sustain ? Not to mention the uncivilized inhabitants of barbarous climes, such as the natives of New Holland, who are scarcely distinguishable from the animal creation except by their exterior shape and the organs of speech ; there the human mind, like the neglected and uncultivated garden, being overgrown with the most noxious weeds ; what a piteous spectacle is the most accomplished man on earth, if the exercise of his rational

powers is suspended ? What a humbling, and moving object is the idiot ? Does he not laugh when he should mourn, and mourn when it becomes him to rejoice ? Beholding such a spectacle, are we disposed to be merry and to make him a laughing-stock ? If we do so, we indicate the most unjustifiable folly ; not knowing but heaven may smite us after the same manner ; and affliction of any kind is not confined to a particular description of men. The poor are not the only subjects of it. Worldly advantages and enjoyments are altogether insufficient to deliver us from distress, whether corporeal or mental, and, indeed, such is the intimate union between the constituents of our nature, that they feel reciprocally the pains of each other. Distress and death look in at the windows of the gorgeous palace, as well as the windows of the lowly cottage ; and the ghastly messenger assails, with an impartial indifference, the man clothed in fine linen who fares sumptuously every day, and the beggar clothed in rags who sits under his table. Riches look gay at a distance. But though we court pleasure in all its various forms, in the end we will be constrained to say with the wise man ;

‘ all

'all is vanity and vexation of spirit;' an inscription fit for every thing temporal and sublunary.

Precious is the season of bodily health and prosperity. Of bodily indisposition numbers of you must have the direful experience. Lying on a bed of languishing, and finding company and food a loathsome sight, what would you have given for the restoration of health; supposing that you could have purchased it at a very costly rate? How many of our fellow men are now pining away in great affliction, which the skill of the ablest physician, and all the ointment of the apothecary, are insufficient to remove? and to what corner soever of the land our attention is turned, the cry of the mourner is heard. Multitudes are in this situation, and do we squander away the health vouchsafed to us, and denied to our fellow men? Enjoying health, we are called to look forward to distress and death. That is only a blink at noontide of the day; and *arise and depart* is the rousing alarm which the king of terrors now sounds in our ears. Were we to enjoy uninterrupted health for long nine hundred and ninety nine years, death would infallibly

come at last. A headache, nay, the least pain in any part of the body, is a sure harbinger of approaching dissolution. It is not in every instance that mankind lie two or three days, not to say weeks or months, on a death-bed, before they die. No, the call is often more sudden. Supposing that, going home from the house of prayer to day, you lose a foot, or break a bone; that you fall into an apoplectic fit, or that one of your blood vessels should burst; where are you? all on the clap of a hand swimming in the shoreless ocean of eternity. If we consider, says one, on how regular a motion of the fluids and balance of the humours, our life depends, life is a greater wonder than even our death would be.

3. *The Time of the Gospel.*

What would health avail us; what would the greatest sublunary bliss be, if our ears were not charmed with the melodious sound of the evangelical trumpet? The gospel unquestionably is the greatest blessing ever bestowed on any people; a blessing which renders a country, though inferior in point of fertility and wealth, superior to all unenlightened

ened regions, by opening the grand prospects of a future state, a glorious resurrection, and an endless blissful immortality; prospects which raise the human mind above this transient world and all the little enjoyments of time; prospects which teach it to aspire after another world and the more substantial enjoyments of it; time and all its allurements being insufficient to feed the enlarged desires of the soul. Laid in the balance with the gospel, all earthly things are lighter than a feather. Is not restoration to the divine favour; is not the remission of our sins; is not the purification of our sinful natures; is not deliverance from hell; is not promotion to celestial glory an inestimable blessing; a blessing which all the tears of repentance, and all the punctuality of amendment of life could never have procured for us? and ought not the vast importance of these blessings be the most powerful persuasive to solicitude and diligence for the attainment of them?

Dreadful beyond thought is the situation of apostate spirits in the infernal world: And what must our situation have been if we had never heard of Jesus, the Saviour? I have not language to paint the melancholy scene. In

that event our situation must have been at once dreadful and despondent ; dreadful, as we stood exposed to the vindictive wrath of an angry God ; and despondent, because no deliverer ; no ransom to rescue us from misery intolerable and endless ; no Mediator to interpose between the offended God and us his offending creatures. Piteous, indeed, is the situation of infidel Jews, of deluded Mahometans, of idolatrous Pagans. That moral evil has entered the world, Pagans themselves see. Of it they experience the baneful effects ; and, thinking it a kind of atonement to heaven, they offer incredibly great quantities of animal, nay, human sacrifices. Their altars smoke. Their victims bleed. But of the manner in which moral evil was introduced into the world by the disobedience of the first Adam, and of the way in which it is put away from the world by the all-atoning sacrifice of the great High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, they are totally ignorant. Dreadful situation ! All the incense of profusion in the rites of idolatrous worship, presented to heaven on the altar of superstitious *show*, is inadequate for appeasing the justly offended Deity ; bespeaks the blind zeal of uninstituted

ted devotion; and must unavoidably terminate in dreadful disappointment. If another atonement than that of Jesus, as has been ignorantly supposed, could have answered the end; if repentance for past offences and resolutions of amendment could have been honourably sustained, as equivalent satisfaction, by heaven, would God have done what he did? would the lawgiver have become the lawfiller? would the eternal Father, whose love to his co-eternal son is as much superior to Abraham's love to Isaac, as divine perfection is to human passion, have stretched forth the hand of justice, taken the bloody knife of vindictive wrath and sheathed it in the bowels of his Son, his only begotten Son? Ruling supreme in the great universe, he, rather than the creatures, is proprietor of the cattle on a thousand hills, and of all the wood of the forest, and can he receive any adequate satisfaction for sin from such trivial victims? To suppose that repentance and amendment of life are sufficient to appease the Deity, and to say that these might have entirely superseded the atonement of Jesus, are doctrines unknown to the Bible, doctrines replete with absurdity, and characteristical of the legality and the ignorance

norance of the human heart. But the gospel reveals a more excellent way of effecting reconciliation between the offended Deity and his offending creatures of the human kind. "This is my beloved Son," said the divine Father, by an audible voice from heaven, "in whom I am well pleased. Precious then is the time of the gospel. For their misimprovement of this invaluable privilege not a few have been deprived of it, who now sit mourning without the sun. 'The lamp which God ordained for his anointed,' in this and the other place, has been extinguished, and darkness has intercepted the beams of heavenly vision. With respect to many, the predictions of Amos have been accomplished. 'Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine for bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.' Now is the time in which we are called to sow for an approaching harvest; and he who soweth and he only will reap. 'He that gathereth in summer
 'mer

'mer is a wise son ; but he that sleepeth in 'harvest is a son that causeth shame'. Now we enjoy our seed-time and summer. O what a pity if our summer be ended before we be saved ! The harvest is at hand. The day of judgment, the decisive day is about to dawn. All things will soon be found ripe for a dissolution. Nature's frame will be unhinged ; the state of men entirely changed ; the saints gathered by angelical reapers into the heavenly *barn* ; the wicked cast, as fuel, into the quenchless fire of Almighty indignation. Fearful, indeed, their doom and final ; for the Judge of all the earth shall seal it with the black wax of irreversibility.

II. The redemption of time supposes the misimprovement and loss of it. A squanderer of this inestimable commodity every man here has been. We are all of different ages ; one ten, another twenty, a third thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, or, perhaps, seventy or eighty years old. But with the most impious prostitution of time we all indiscriminately stand accusable. Is there so much as one individual in the company that can plead *not guilty* ; who can, Pilate-like, wash his hands, and say, in this instance, 'I have no sin' ? Let
the

the person in middle life, and the person in old age, look back and repent the folly of his early years; the healthful mourn over his misimprovement of health; and with regard to the gospel there is reason for sharpening the edge of contrition, that the feelings of the professor in a state of lethargy may be awakened. How many calls and invitations from heaven has each of you withstood; calls the most urgent and importunate, as well as the most friendly to your best interests? How often would the condescending and compassionate Jesus have gathered our Jerusalem, 'as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings,' and she would not? Nay, his importunity and patience are famous to a proverb. How pathetical and tender his expostulation, "Open to me, my sister, my love, " my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with the dew, and my locks with the " drops of the night!"

Many excellent sermons have you heard; sermons fraught with the tidings of peace; sermons composed with care and delivered with propriety; and in which ability and zeal were conspicuously united. Frequently have you drunk of the fruit of the vine

vine in your heavenly father's presence; and for a Christian to live in the habitual neglect of communicating, is an obvious contradiction; communicating, I say, which is a duty indispensably incumbent on every man who professes himself a member of the Saviour's mystical body. "As often as ye eat "this bread and drink this cup," rather the wine in it, "ye do shew," or, as it might be read, "shew ye the Lord's death till he come." Nay, numbers of us were drinking of the juice of the grape only a few hours ago, a symbolical representation of that sacred blood which, by faith, is applied to the conscience, and which purifies the soul. But what occasion have we to clothe ourselves with sackcloth and 'join trembling with our mouth!' Misimproving time, the season of youth, the time of prosperity, and the day of Grace, we have sold our opportunities, and, foolish bargain! *sold them for nought*. Such folly how criminal and how dangerous! Shall not such folly prove a source of the most abundant sorrow? The misimprovement of such sacred privileges has been productive of the most fatal effects. Sacred history abounds in instances. When the Jews were carried into captivity

captivity greatly was Jeremiah afflicted. The book of Lamentations, which was composed on that melancholy occasion, is observed to be tender and moving to admiration. ‘ One
 ‘ would think every letter written with a tear;
 ‘ every word the sound of a breaking heart;
 ‘ and that the writer was a man of sorrows,
 ‘ who scarce ever breathed but in sighs, or
 ‘ spake but in groans.’ I mention this instance to show, that the contempt of religion among all descriptions of men, and amidst an abundance of privileges, should be afflictive to us all; afflictive to us as the church’s friends, and as being art and part in the sins which trouble her. Recollecting our past opportunities, and the misimprovement of them, let us water our couch with our tears, and join in the plaintive streams of the weeping prophet. But,

III. Even in the present case, however doleful, grief is not to end in despair. There is one, and, indeed, only one method of redeeming the time. The improvement of the present time is the only method to compensate the loss of the past. This improvement of present opportunities, as a compensation for former inactivity and lack of diligence, is an expedient
 which

which both religion and reason dictate; an expedient, I say, which receives the sanction of both. But how is the time to be improved? The text is introduced in a participial form; a circumstance which I mention to show that it must have a dependence on the context. Now the method of redeeming the time which the Apostle, in the context, suggests, is to 'walk circumspectly.' Be circumspect, look around you; and O Christians, let the consideration, that 'the days are evil,' and that your example, as you are the professed votaries of heaven, if wrong directed, must have a most pernicious tendency, inspire you with zeal and resolution in so noble a cause. Simular is the exhortation of Peter. 'Be sober, be vigilant, because 'your adversary the devil, as a roaring 'lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may 'devour; whom resist stedfast in the faith.' Your adversary, in whom are united the serpent's policy and the lion's power, stalketh about, haggard-like, that he may plot and procure your ruin. During the day the beasts of prey betake themselves to their dens, and, when the sable shades of night return to dress the fields in their mourning weed, they
haunt

haunt the desert, and traverse the forest in quest of their unsuspecting prey. In the night of desertion, God, for holy and just reasons, is pleased to leave his people, in some measure, to themselves; and they, perhaps, indulge in degrees of infobriety and sloth, which disturb their quiet, and endanger their peace; this is an opportunity which the watchful foe improves; and subtilty is characteristic of all his machinations and attempts. But the south wind of heavenly consolation returning to blow, and dispelling the clouds which brood upon the Christian's mind, he discovers his error, and sees clearly that grace is not to be abused into licentiousness. *Be vigilant.* The great concern which should employ our attention, and by promoting which we may be said, in a great measure, to improve the present, and retrieve the loss of the past time, is the salvation of our immortal souls. We may be solicitous to amass great sums of silver and gold, and, by famous acquisitions in learning, or otherwise, to enhance our reputation; but the salvation of the soul, in a subserviency to the promotion of heaven's declarative glory, is, indeed, the all, which is worthy of our most serious attention

attention and most earnest pursuit. Martha seems most solicitous to entertain, in the very best manner, her divine Lord, to whom it was as his meat and his drink to do the will of his heavenly father; and, indeed, we might ask, who would not have been anxious to accommodate and entertain the matchless guest? But Mary, in this instance, was wiser. Most desirous to receive information from him, she, in her deep humility, and according to the Jewish custom, sat at the blessed feet of Jesus. To her honour, it is said, that, as 'one thing,' and only one thing is needful, she chose 'that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.'

The phrase, redeeming the time, it has often been observed, might be translated *buying the opportunity*. The allusion probably is to a merchant, who, with persevering diligence and indefatigable assiduity, pursues his business; and much more solicitous for his profit than anxious about his pleasure, embraces every opportunity of buying and selling to advantage. Allow me to consider time under the familiar notion of a creditor. The past part of our time having been denied the improvement, to which it had a claim, and

which confessedly was its due, insists strenuously for satisfaction. Now what is the reparation which this aggrieved creditor requires, and without which he positively refuses to give us an honourable discharge? What are his demands, and what restitution does he ask? He calls aloud for the most diligent application and the most vigorous exertions, in the improvement of opportunities now present, but which will soon be past, and never more return. Were the accountant to neglect his books; were the slothful merchant to buy and sell at random; allowing his commercial affairs to run into disorder; what disagreeable consequences would unavoidably ensue? Be his profits ever so great, he would soon be hurried into bankruptcy. The application is obvious. If the slothful sinner, whose spiritual interests have hitherto been woefully neglected, does not now double his diligence; if he trusts to the sealed book of the divine decrees and eternal election, and never looks into the more legible book of his effectual vocation in time, what will be the consequences? Awful indeed! A bankrupt was he born, and a bankrupt will he die. Deep in arrears to the law and the justice

tice of God, the great creditor, to whom every sinner is a debtor, and an insolvent debtor; he will in a little be called to an account; and thus should induce the ministers of religion, of every denomination, to press home on the conscience of his hearers the evil and the danger of their sins. In the great business of his salvation the sinner is now called to engage. His *all* is at stake; and, if he allows sloth to occupy the place of assiduity and diligence, he must die a spiritual beggar, and, while endless ages roll on, go in the beggar's garb. There can be nothing more impious, absurd, or dangerous, than for a sinner to pry *curiously* into heaven's secrets, particularly his own eternal election; impious, I say, for it is an attempt to discover what the OMNISCIENT has not yet revealed; and absurd, for it is an endeavour to invert the proper order of things; and dangerous, because it is a trifling with the important interests of the immortal soul. Foolishly do many dispute on spiritual topics; one saying, "if I was elected from everlasting I will be eventually saved, and, on this account, I intend to keep myself quite easy;" another saying, "God is a merciful being, and will the clemency of his

nature allow him to torment the creatures whom he made?" This is a mode of reasoning which proceeds on a mistake ; for God is just as well as merciful ; and the claims of justice are no less inviolable than the propensions of mercy are strong ; a mode of reasoning this which reason, as well as revelation, reprobates. When we are sick we apply to the physician for skill, and to the apothecary for medicine ; and will we not use the means to *work out our salvation* which heaven has inseparably connected with the end ? *Give all diligence*, says Peter, *to make first your calling sure* ; and if you attain to the comfortable knowledge of your effectual calling in time, it will be at once an indisputable proof and a native consequence of your election from eternity. Besides, the knowledge of your state will be a rich spring of religious comfort ; and, though you may be saved *as by fire*, in the end, if you remain unsolicitous about the attainable knowledge of your state, you will be, in a great measure, a stranger to the joys of God's holy spirit.

The improvement of the present time is the only way of compensating the loss of the past. Time is irrevocable. Were you to
give

give worlds, had you them at your disposal, you could not recal yesterday, which is past; nay, this morning you saw once, but will never see a second time. What then? Improve the present time, and, by no means, let it slip away as much unimproved as the past. Sinners have long 'stood idle in the 'market-place.' We all have access to the market of free grace in the gospel; nay, we all are called, I should rather have said, commanded, to buy of Jesus, the wondrous merchant from the far country, the inestimably precious commodities, which he exposes in it. These commodities are various as well as of great worth. Here is the *gold* of saving grace; the *white raiment* of the Saviour's imputed righteousness; and the *eye-salve* of divine illumination; and we, as well as the Laodiceans, are commanded to buy. Obtaining commodities of such unequalled value, who would be unwilling to 'deny ungodliness and worldly lusts;' to deny himself sinful ease and carnal pleasures? Does the avaricious trader grasp every opportunity of buying and selling to advantage? O sinner, buy now or never; and buy freely. Nor is the price of repentance and

preparatory reformation required. Nay, no price is asked. You are called to 'buy without money and without price. Now is the 'day of salvation.'

We are all travellers to the eternal world, and have already lost much precious time. The conduct of the anxious traveller is worthy of our imitation. When he has loitered too long at the inn, and sees night coming on, he mends his pace, and goes as fast as he can; and sinner, will you not be diligent to accomplish your journey before night overtake you, and the door of our heavenly Father's house be eternally shut? It is, I own, exceedingly natural for us to procrastinate, and how fatal is procrastination to multitudes? How many, Felix-like, shuffle off, for the present, their most important concerns, waiting the convenient season, which will suit their own fatuous inclinations, and the mischievous designs of the enemy of God and men? On death-bed repentance many depend, and the dependence is equally dangerous and common. That Felix, stifling the common convictions of the spirit, postponed all religious solicitude till a posterior season, which he unhappily imagined would be

be more convenient, the book of the Acts informs us. But of the arrival of that imaginary convenient season, the sequel of the history says nothing, and there is every reason to believe that it is yet to come. I do not say but numbers, like the famous thief on the cross, have been converted in their dying moments. Affliction is often a precious season; in which many have sought God, and found him. But it is dangerous, beyond conception, to delay till the very last moment. A thousand things are supposeable. We may die suddenly. A universal stupor and insensibility may render us altogether incapable of reflection and thought.

But, methinks, I hear a young person in the company interrupting me. 'You may urge me to immediate diligence and preparation for the eternal world; but, be the consequences what they may, I am resolved to indulge in carelessness a while longer for these reasons which follow; partly because I am young; partly because I am healthful; and partly because my Christian privileges are great, and I can see no immediate danger of being deprived of them.' I only make the supposition, and would hope, at the same time,

time, that it is groundless. But, whatever you may think, uncertainty is inscribed in all your enjoyments, which may be removed in a moment. Nay, if we consider the afflictive situation of many, our own liableness to distress and death, together with our responsibility to heaven for our present enjoyments, we will see the most powerful persuasives to our duty. Remember that present health cannot always exempt from distemper. Esteem your Christian privileges as the gifts of heaven and the salt of all your enjoyments. Youth is a season, the improvement of which might be urged by arguments the most urgent, and motives the most unanswerable. To excite young persons to begin betimes to seek and to serve a beneficent redeemer, they are to recollect that the authority of heaven is interposed; the authority of that great Being who made, and who alone can redeem us. ‘Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not; nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.’

My young brethren, to glorify God is the ultimate end of both your creation and redemption, also should be the ultimate end of

all

all your actions, whether civil or religious; and think seriously how matters are to be with you through the endless ages of a long eternity; for when millions of ages shall have revolved eternity will be, as much as ever, only to commence. Alas, the inconsiderateness of youth! Early piety is crowned with peculiar advantages. However mankind differ in their opinions about other matters, they agree in this, that of all the different periods of life youth is incomparably the most precious; and will we not consecrate the first and best part of our time to God and his service? Beginning betimes to seek and serve the redeemer, you may be the happy and honoured instruments of promoting his sacred interests, for a long series of years, in the world; an employment which is at once the highest felicity and the highest dignity of human nature. How many die in childhood and youth? It is altogether uncertain whether you arrive at the more advanced periods of life; and, supposing you do, as you grow up, you will be farther and farther immersed in worldly concerns and secular pursuits. Hence, instead of more leisure for attending to the duties of religion, you will have

have far less. Early converts to Jesus have experienced manifestations and seasons of communion with God, to which, in their riper years, they have been, in a great measure, strangers; seasons the recollection of which has often caused them to exclaim, *O that it were with me as in months, or years past!* Remembering the love of espousals and their first acquaintance with Jesus, their souls have glowed with spiritual ardour. Attend punctually to all the duties and ordinances of religion; to which let the authority of heaven, like the loadstone, irresistibly draw you; concealing yourselves frequently in religious sequestration and retirement; and give no sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids till you obtain a saving interest in Christ.

To incite you to *redeem* the time, keep alive on your minds the brevity of it; also the probable suddenness of death, together with the apprehensions of a fearful judgment, and a long eternity. 'The fashion of this world passeth away.' Like the stage, on which different persons are brought up, one after another, till, at last, they and the scene also are removed; one individual and generation follows another till they all disappear; and the

the theatre of time, on which they acted their respective parts, is taken away. One generation does not go and another come in the compass of a month or of a year. The change is more imperceptible. One dies here and another there; one born in this place, another in that place; and hence generations start up unnoticed in each other's room. Changeable are the customs and fashions of time. Every age has its peculiarities. In dress, in the construction of houses, in the punctilios of breeding and honour, and all the gay amusements of life, widely different is this age from the last; and, as we have, we think, improved on our ancestors, the generations that follow, will, doubtless, make improvements on us. Soaring on the wings of hope and exalted expectation, Christians seek the undisturbed possession of that world where the wind of alteration does not ruffle the *sea of glass*. The brevity of time, the remembrance of which should incite us to redeem it, is a consideration at once awful and joyous; joyous to the Christian, and, beyond expression, awful to the wicked. How precarious is sublunary bliss! In this world the wicked enjoy their good things; their
lands

lands and possessions, titles and honours, ambition and prospects ; and for reasons, which are best known to his unerring will, he often allows the wicked, while in this world, to spread himself like ' a green bay tree.' He has chosen the poor of this world to be ' rich in faith and heirs of the celestial kingdom.' But how precarious, I say again, is sublunary bliss ! Read the histories of this and of other kingdoms, and behold the humbling ashes of them, who once dwelt in their splendid mansions, who once rode, with a contemptuous sneer, in their gilded chariots, and are now laid in total oblivion. When mankind blend with the mass of earth on which we daily tread, between the dust of the elevated senator and the dust of the common foldier, the most philosophical eye is unable to distinguish. The grim messenger will not be controlled by strength, nor illuded by bribe ; and rest not secure, O rich man, in your wealth. On the other hand, lift up your heads, ye expectant heirs of immortality, heirs of an inheritance which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Bid defiance to fire and faggot. Let not all the apparatus of the Spanish inquisition

sition, a tribunal which is an endless disgrace to humanity, not to say religion, inspire you with horror, or mar your resolution to persevere in your Christian course? But rise superior to the contempt and the malice of the world. It is a prevailing opinion that Moses stood candidate for the crown of Egypt, and would have succeeded to the monarchy of that opulent empire. These flattering prospects, which would strongly impress a young mind, laid in the one scale, and the afflictions of God's people in the other, what choice did the good man make? A choice for which he will be applauded by posterity, and the propriety of which he now sees in a more striking point of view. He chose 'rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.' A choice this which would not disgrace the aristocrätical head more than the democrätical heart, and would give a dignity to mental accomplishments, and a virtue to opulent possessions; shedding a heavenly lustre on all.

What an infinite disparity is there between
the

the unsuccessive duration of the great, the incomprehensible God, and the existence of mortal men, which is measured by a few uncertain days and years. Allow me to mention the striking contrast. In one extended view the great God intuitively beholds all things past, present, and to come; and eternity alone, which knows neither commencement nor consummation, is co-eval with his existence. But "man, who is born of a woman, spends his years as a tale that is told," and is no sooner born than he begins to die; for mortality is interwoven into his very constitution, and drags his earthly tabernacle, at last, down to the grave. In a little the present generation will be as if it had never been; and when you have gone to the eternal world, your children will fill your places; and may they serve the God of Abraham more faithfully than you have done. Nor are you, my young brethren, to imagine that I am not now addressing myself to you. Perhaps the son will die before the father, and the daughter before the mother. Death in this respect, may appear somewhat partial; and when the edict leaves the throne of the Most High, it has the hatchet in readiness to bring the

the

the fatal stroke. A *midnight-cry* is sometimes given. Drenching in carelessness, the person is unexpectedly accosted with a messenger, who *commands* attention, and *forces* obedience. Nor can the strongest constitution, more than the weakest, withstand the stroke. Blooming youth as well as fading old age is cut down. The hatchet is applied to tender plants, and blowing flowers, as well as old trees. Nay, the hardest oak in all the forest is unable to withstand the blast; the blast which rages from sea to sea, and spreads desolation between pole and pole; and is felt equally by Hottentots in the south and Britons in the north, by the Mahometans in the east and the Christians in the west.

The stroke of death may probably come on us on a sudden; and where is the opportunity for 'redeeming the time?' The religion of Jesus, which enriches the human mind with the noblest prospects, teaches us, that between the death of the godly and the death of the wicked there is a difference greater than between light and darkness. 'The wicked is driven away in his wickedness.' How emphatical and expressive the phraseology here! He is reluctant and unwilling to go. But
go

go he must. 'He is driven away. But the
 'righteous man little hath in his death.'
 With a mind placid and serene, even amidst
 a scene of persecution from the combined
 attacks of hell and earth, amidst, I say, the
 fury of opposing winds, which blow from
 different quarters, he can behold his last
 change. Like the weary traveller, who has
 just finished a toilsome journey, the Christi-
 an lies down in the grave, as on a downy
 pillow; and enjoys a balmy sleep of undis-
 turbed rest in Jesus till the morning of the
 resurrection-day, when he awakens from a
 sweet sleep, refreshed and invigorated for the
 exercises of an endless day. But, methinks,
 I hear the Christian, who sat with King Je-
 sus at his table yesterday, and who expects
 to sit with him soon on his heavenly throne,
 saying, 'could not my God and Redeemer,
 'who delivered me from the sting of natu-
 'ral death, have also delivered me from the
 'stroke of it; translating me instantaneously,
 'in both soul and body, to the metropolis of
 'his empire, in which I have obtained a right
 'of citizenship in common with all the saints;
 'and with which I am carrying on a mysteri-
 'ous traffic, a traffic profoundly unknown to
 the

' the men of the world ? Did he not translate
 ' Enoch that he should not see death, and car-
 ' ry Elijah, who dropt his prophetic mantle
 ' to Elifha, to heaven in a fiery chariot ? And
 ' is not his omnipotence the same to day that
 ' it was prior to the actual incarnation of
 ' Christ ?' All your reasoning I allow to be
 just and conclusive. But, in ordinary cases,
 saints, as well as sinners, are subjected to the
 stroke of natural death ; and, though the
 scripture is not so explicit on this as on
 many other topics, yet these among other
 reasons may be assigned for it. The morta-
 lity of the saints is calculated to keep them
 in mind of their sin ; for with respect to all
 sin is the cause, death the consequence. The
 saints die that they may be glorified in a
 manner, which corresponds to the compa-
 rative excellence of the constituent parts of
 their nature, the soul, as superior to the body,
 has in this as well as other instances the pre-
 cedency ; that they may experience the Re-
 deemer's special sympathy in death, a crisis
 in which they much need it ; and, in fine,
 they die, that they may be, as far as possible,
 conformed to their blessed head, who slept
 in the heart of the earth, and perfumed the

D

grave

grave for the reception of his followers. O my Christian brethren, in a little our sovereign will come in the clouds of heaven, and, like the warbling songsters, which hail the approach of the morning sun, we bid him welcome, 'come quickly Lord Jesus.'

Upon the whole, O thoughtless sinners, listen, with an attentive ear, to the apostolical exhortation before you. 'See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.' Let not your whole attention be occupied by the fruitless pursuits of a transient world. Attention, it is true, to your personal and domestic interests, even in a secular point of view, is necessary and commendable. But let those be always inferior, and subordinate ends; for if you gain the whole world itself, which is by no means supposable, and lose your souls, you gain nothing, and lose all. Think not then an hour or two every day, and a day or two, such as this, once in the six months, because you refrain from your lawful occupations, and wait on the duties of religion, as your reasonable service, are mispent. The hours spent in religious duty are devoted to HIM who sits

at

at the helm of affairs, and providentially orders poverty and wealth, who 'giveth and 'taketh away;' and, as the first fruits sanctified the ensuing harvest among the Jews, your religious avocations are calculated to bless all your increase. Buy the opportunities; redeem the time; and you will never repent the price of indefatigable application and unwearied assiduity, though you give even this for the redemption of it; and by no means give place to procrastination. Awful is the death of the wicked; and in hell the redemption of time is impracticable. In the end the judge of all the earth is to pronounce an irrevocable sentence on assembled worlds. Universal nature will be in agitation. The whirlwind of God's fierce indignation will overset the judgment seat itself, and carry the devil and his angels, with an impenitent world, into hell; where the corroding worm of a guilty conscience will pray eternally on the vitals of the damned, and the fire of God's vindictive wrath will never be quenched. Tremendous punishment! a punishment preceded and prognosticated by awful prodigies; for universal nature will be in a state of unprecedented consternation. If I had a thousand

and mouths and a thousand tongues, I could
not express the one half of infernal misery.
'Deliver me from going down to the pit, O
'Lord, thou hast found a ransom.'

F I N I S.

18 AP 59